



# INITIATIVE 10:

## IMPROVE MASSDOT-RTA COLLABORATION

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### DEFINED ROLES, CURRENT PRACTICE, AND PRACTICES IN OTHER STATES

Like most states, Massachusetts has both a statewide Department of Transportation (DOT) overseeing different modes of transportation, and numerous independent transit operators providing services in urban and rural environments. The relationship between these DOTs and transit operators varies depending on enabling legislation, administrative structure and funding relationships.

In Massachusetts, the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) operate as independent authorities, yet rely on the state for fiscal contributions as codified in M.G.L. Chapter 161B. This law also provides the state with certain oversight responsibilities. Creation of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) in 2009 introduced a new administrative structure and policy into the state transportation arena. New roles and responsibilities were defined within Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009<sup>1</sup>, but have yet to be fully promulgated or put into practice. Because of this, and differences with regard to how state funding should be allocated, the working relationship between the MassDOT and the RTAs has been strained and to date, less collaborative than in other states.

Better defined roles and responsibilities would ensure more realistic expectations, and a basis from which MassDOT and the RTAs could more successfully collaborate to serve the customer and protect the interest of the taxpayer. Identifying common goals and working as a team to achieve these goals should create the opportunity to provide better service, increase ridership, improve facilities, and operate with increased efficiency.

## DEFINED ROLES AND CURRENT PRACTICE IN MASSACHUSETTS

### M.G.L. Chapter 161B – Regional Transit Authorities

M.G.L. Chapter 161B defines the process by which RTAs may be formed or expanded within the Commonwealth, as well as the duties, powers and limitations of these RTAs. The law also outlines the role and membership of RTA Advisory Boards and their ability to appoint administrators, approve budgets, and approve significant changes in service or fares.

Additional responsibilities, roles and duties of the RTAs, as defined in Chapter 161B and that have specific impact on their relationship with the Commonwealth, include:

- RTAs may accept state (or federal) grants or loans, but must accede to such conditions and obligations that may be imposed as a prerequisite to such funds.
- RTAs must seek approval from the Secretary of Transportation to issue bonds, use their Reserve Fund or use their Stabilization Fund.
- RTAs are directed to determine the net cost of service and local assessment levels in accordance with sound accounting practice and guidelines developed in consultation with MassDOT.
- RTAs are directed to consult with MassDOT to prepare an annual program for mass transportation, including a long range program for the construction, reconstruction or alteration

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009, *An Act Modernizing the Transportation Systems of the Commonwealth*, served to update M.G.L. Chapter 6C outlining the duties and roles of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.



of facilities together with a schedule for implementation and comprehensive financial estimates of costs and revenues.

- RTAs must provide annual reports to both the Secretary of Transportation and the MA Legislature.

Specific duties and powers of the Commonwealth, as outlined in Chapter 161B, include:

- Pay 50% of the RTAs' Net Cost of Service and debt service (unless revenues of the RTA are sufficient to cover outstanding debt).
- Impose provisions to be included in operating contracts between RTAs and private operators to ensure efficient operation, and minimum burden on the Commonwealth, and the cities and towns within each RTA. These conditions are also intended to ensure contract assistance is provided for projects which are consistent with the program for public mass transportation for each RTA.
- Perform biennial audits of RTAs.
- Establish guidelines for the distribution of bond funds among the RTAs; the State is directed to ensure aggregate bonding does not exceed \$20 million at any one time, with 75% of bond proceeds going to match federal or other non-state funding.
- Take actions related to securing federal assistance for the RTAs, such as filing applications, supervising the expenditure of federal funds and complying with federal requirements.

Chapter 161B also establishes an RTA Council for the purposes of coordination and sharing information and best practices in matters of security and public safety, service delivery, cost savings, and administrative efficiencies. Council membership is to include each RTA Administrator, with the Secretary serving as chairperson and the General Manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority serving as a non-voting member. The Council is directed to meet no less than once each calendar quarter or upon the request, with reasonable notice, of the Secretary.

## Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009 – MA Department of Transportation

Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009 defines the constitution and powers of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). Section 30(b) of this chapter clearly states that “any regional transportation authorities established under Chapter 161 or 161B shall be within the jurisdiction of the department.” Section 53 further gives MassDOT's Transit Division responsibility for overseeing, coordinating and planning all transit and rail matters throughout the Commonwealth, including intercity bus, the MBTA, the RTAs, and the RTA Council.

The following summarizes specific MassDOT responsibilities, roles and duties that reference or relate to the RTAs:

- Direct and administer transit programs, and the planning, design, construction and improvement of transportation facilities, and related infrastructure.
- Adopt regulations and procedures for the administration of Chapter 25. Review and recommend changes in laws, rules, programs and policies of the Commonwealth and its agencies to further transportation financing, infrastructure and development.
- Act as the central entity and coordinating organization for transportation initiatives on behalf of the Commonwealth and work in collaboration with other entities to advance interests and investments in transportation.
- Enter into agreements with authorities to improve efficiency and program effectiveness and to preserve fiscal resources. Promote economy and efficiency; and, leverage federal funding and private investment.
- Develop and administer the long-term statewide transportation plan; develop a process, procedures and criteria for transportation project selection.
- Administer the Massachusetts Transportation Trust Fund (MTTF).



- Enter into agreements with public and private entities dealing with transportation to distribute and provide for leveraging of monies for promoting overall economic growth.
- Provide assistance to local authorities to maximize opportunities for transportation and development initiatives.
- Ensure regional equity related to transportation planning, construction, maintenance, capital improvement, development and funding.

Chapter 25 also outlines the structural relationship between MassDOT and regional planning entities regarding transportation planning and project development. MassDOT's Office of Transportation Planning is established as the principal source of planning for *state-level* transportation projects; the Office is further directed to work with regional planning agencies, which remain the principal source of planning for *local and regional* projects. MassDOT is also directed to cooperate with RTAs to support local and regional planning, deliver transportation programs and execute demonstration projects.

MassDOT is responsible for preparing a statewide intermodal transportation plan to improve and maintain facilities and equipment and to ensure the equitable allocation of investments across regions. This plan is to include transportation improvement projects for all RTAs, as well as an analysis to identify ways in which each RTA can improve the efficiency of existing service, and provide new or expanded services to the communities.

Chapter 25 also provides MassDOT with several coordinating roles on the administrative level to promote the overall efficiency of transportation delivery in the Commonwealth. Specifically, MassDOT is directed to:

- Function as a single agency to consolidate human resources, financial management, information technology, legal, procurement and asset management.
- Require divisions to establish program goals and a performance measurement system; MassDOT is to publish an annual Scorecard using this information and to report on progress to improve the effectiveness of service delivery and project development.
- Use performance criteria to determine the quality of service provided by all private entities that deliver transportation services on behalf of the department and to use these performance measures as criteria in negotiating contracts.
- Establish and operate an asset management system for all divisions to report on condition, and to oversee and coordinate the maintenance, preservation, reconstruction and investment in these assets.
- Utilize life-cycle costing in all project planning and selection in order to demonstrate that sufficient revenues exist or will be generated to maintain assets in a state of good repair.

## Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities (MARTA)

The Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities (MARTA) is a non-profit organization that represents Massachusetts' 15 RTAs. MARTA works closely with the RTAs and often serves to present MassDOT and the Legislature with updates on RTA accomplishments, as well as serving as a voice on formal RTA positions on issues and concerns. MARTA also works with MassDOT on such initiatives as an annual joint conference sponsored by MARTA, MassDOT and the MA Rural Transit Assistance Program (maRTAP). The association is funded via RTA dues and is professionally staffed (one position).

## Summary of Current Practice and Issues

M.G.L. Chapter 161B establishes the individual RTAs as independent operating authorities, yet also outlines formal reporting requirements to, and certain fiscal oversight responsibilities by the State. The more recently enacted Chapter 25 places the RTAs under the jurisdiction of MassDOT, and provides the Department with a range of oversight and coordination roles related to the delivery of efficient



transportation services throughout the Commonwealth. In general, these entities are functioning as prescribed and the Commonwealth is host to a multi-faceted and comprehensive transportation system.

However, there are a number of responsibilities that are not being performed. In addition, during the stakeholder interviews conducted at the beginning of the study, many stakeholders shared frustration with the lack of a working partnership and the presence of a general level of distrust between MassDOT and the RTAs. The following issues and challenges have been identified:

- **Unclear roles and responsibilities/roles not being performed as defined:** Certain roles and responsibilities defined in Chapters 25 of the Acts of 2009 and M.G.L. Chapter 161B are not being fulfilled. Whether this is due to inadequate funding, lack of staff resources or a happenstance of administrative priorities, this contributes to uncertainty and distrust. Directives from these two laws that do not appear to be carried out today include:

#### Chapter 161B

- MassDOT has not developed “provisions to be included in operating contracts between RTAs and private operators to ensure efficient operation, and minimum burden on the Commonwealth, and the cities and towns within each RTA.”
- The RTAs do not develop an annual “program for mass transportation” that defines a long-range program for mass transportation.
- MassDOT does not ensure that contract assistance is provided for projects that are consistent with the RTAs programs for mass transportation.
- The Commonwealth does not conduct biennial audits of the RTAs (only seven of the RTAs have been audited over the past ten years).
- The RTA Council has not met since before the creation of MassDOT.

#### Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009

- MassDOT has developed a process, procedures and criteria for transit project selection (as part of the long range transportation planning process), but this process is not completely in-line with allocations for funding for RTA capital projects.
- MassDOT has not yet established an asset management system for transit.
- MassDOT has not developed a performance measurement system, nor does it publish an annual Scorecard to report on transit performance.
- MassDOT does not use life-cycle costing in project planning and selection for any assets other than vehicles.

There is also some room for interpretation in how these directives should be carried out. It would be helpful if MassDOT were to provide clear guidance on what should be included in each RTA’s “annual program for mass transportation,” and what sort of data should be reported in terms of asset condition, life-cycle costs, performance data, etc.

- **Lack of mutually agreed upon goals:** While the MA Statewide Transportation Program identifies statewide goals, none have been specifically articulated with respect to regional transit services. If common goals could be mutually agreed upon, MassDOT and the RTAs would have a clear vision and direction and could better work together.
- **MassDOT and RTAs do not currently work as a team:** RTAs fall under MassDOT’s jurisdiction, but are not necessarily treated as “part of the team.” For example, RTAs should be routinely and expressly invited to partake in training and to take advantage of technical assistance offered to other MassDOT divisions. At the same time, a different approach would be for MassDOT to play a more limited coordination and oversight role, provide funding and then let the RTAs use it as they see fit.
- **Lack of coordination and leadership on statewide transit initiatives:** MassDOT periodically updates the Long Range Transportation Plan and actively participates in regional



planning efforts. However, there have been few successful examples of statewide transit initiatives. For example, many RTAs have moved to implement AVL technology, but most have procured different equipment technologies, minimizing the opportunity for systems integration.

- **Ineffective channels of communication:** Despite open lines of communication and periodic opportunities to interact, stakeholders on either side do not feel as though their voices or concerns are being heard or addressed. Some have developed personal relationships and feel as though they can obtain feedback and get issues resolved, while others have no confidence that critical matters will be handled quickly. This is true regardless of whether it is MassDOT or an RTA that is looking for information, input or a response.

The RTA Council has not met for several years, and not since the creation of MassDOT. However, it is not clear that the council previously served as an effective venue for communication. Prior to reform, the council served primarily to encourage coordination between the RTAs and the MBTA. There were several factors that limited the effectiveness of this group:

- The RTAs and MBTA have different needs and priorities. While the RTAs may have been looking to the State/MBTA for technical guidance, assistance and issue resolution, the MBTA often sent different representatives to these meetings and provided little continuity.
- RTA administrators are generally well versed in most technical aspects of their business, while the MBTA staff tended to be more specialized in one area, such as planning, finance, fare collection, etc. This made it challenging to get appropriate information or make decisions on a specific issue if the MBTA representative was not involved in the topic.
- Topics were not of interest to everyone. For example, not all RTAs were interested in coordination with the MBTA at commuter rail stations.
- The areas identified for collaboration did not necessarily reflect the day-to-day priorities of the RTAs. It was often easier for RTA Administrators to work through and solve an issue on their own, rather than wait to develop a joint, statewide solution.
- Quarterly meetings of one hour duration did not provide enough time to address issues, and there was effectively no staff resources available to work on issues in between meetings.

MassDOT has indicated an intent to reestablish this group, although no specific date, format or agenda has been proposed as of yet.

MARTA appears to have stepped in to take up more of a coordination role, often communicating with MassDOT on behalf of the RTAs. However, in confidential interviews with RTA Administrators in the fall of 2011, several indicated that although they value the collective voice that MARTA provides, they also desire to strengthen direct communication between MassDOT and the RTAs.

## BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER STATES

As stated earlier, the relationships between DOTs and transit operators across the United States vary depending on enabling legislation, administrative structure and funding relationships. Recognizing these differences, the focus of the following best practice evaluation was not on administrative structure or particular responsibilities, but on how the DOTs and transit operators work cooperatively to establish and achieve common goals, and how the DOTs help to foster a more collaborative and productive working relationship. Examples are provided below.





## State DOT Staffing

Throughout this study, the RTAs have voiced frustration that MassDOT does not respond to RTAs in a timely manner on issues ranging from requests for information, clarification, the use (or lack thereof) of the information they provide, and in fulfilling responsibilities that are required of them, or that they have assumed. Recent examples cited by the RTAs include broken links on MassDOT's RTA web page, and Google Transit data not being updated. Many RTAs have expressed many frustrations in dealing with MassDOT, and most of those believe that much of the problem is that MassDOT does not devote sufficient staff to its transit responsibilities.

At present, there are only three positions within MassDOT's Transit Office. Based on a quick review of what is done in other states (additional analysis is currently being conducted), MassDOT's transit staffing levels do appear to be low compared to those at other state DOTs:

- Colorado: 8
- Ohio: 14
- Minnesota: More than 30
- New York: 3 for just rural programs
- New Hampshire: 2 (for a state with relatively little public transit)
- Vermont: 4

## Transit Policy Statements/Program Handbooks

Many states publish a comprehensive, one-stop source document on state transit programs. These documents detail overall program goals and policies, describe the roles and responsibilities of state and local stakeholders, and outline requirements for grant applications, reporting, and other tasks.

- Virginia's Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) regularly updates a Strategic Plan identifying agency goals and monitoring progress on key initiatives. The DRPT website has a dedicated page explaining how public transportation decisions are made, and the department regularly updates its *Public Transportation and Transportation Demand Management Grant Program Application Guidance*, which provides eligibility, project selection and procurement guidelines for both federal and state transit grant programs.
- The Iowa Office of Public Transit publishes a Transit Manager's Handbook, which provides detailed guidance on the role of the Iowa DOT, funding programs, planning and reporting requirements, and guidelines on contracting, procurement, capital management, vehicle operations, training, and federal compliance.
- Both Oregon and Minnesota are in the process of developing Transit Providers Handbooks. In Oregon, chapters on capital asset management and vehicle maintenance have been developed and are posted for public reference.

These documents give local transportation providers procedural guidance and an overview of programmatic rules and deadlines that must be met. However, given that most local transportation providers are generally cognizant of the policies and program rules affecting their business, these documents are perhaps most helpful in providing the general public and other stakeholders with a clear and transparent overview of public transportation programs.

## Technical Guidance and Support

As detailed in *Initiative 1: Develop Service Guidelines*, and *Initiative 2: Improve Service Planning*, many states issue guidance for service design and evaluation. Many offer technical and compliance guidance in additional areas, including:



- Transit facility development guidelines / Minimum service guidelines
- Procurement guidelines and sample RFP templates
- Federal compliance (e.g. vehicle disposition guidelines, sample Drug & Alcohol policies)
- Vehicle maintenance and inspection guidelines

Other states offer more innovative and unique mechanisms to support local transit providers, as follows:

- The North Carolina Department of Public Transit issues guidance on performance based management, including performance-based budgeting, billing methods that encourage performance, and fiscal management guidelines. These guidelines include a rate setting model to calculate the fully allocated cost of providing community service and how to set rates (e.g. rate per mile).
- Both North Carolina and Oregon hold periodic workshops on their online grant management systems.
- The Ohio DOT conducts Technical Assistance Reviews for each provider about every four years. These reviews ensure grantees are in compliance with federal and state rules, and provide the opportunity for the state to learn more about each local program.
- The Washington State DOT (WSDOT) offers a Peer Review Program in partnership with the State Transit Association and the Community Transportation Association of the Northwest. Participation is voluntary and is initiated by a request to the Public Transportation Division. These reviews can encompass an entire agency's operations or simply one technical element. For example, one operator requested a peer review of its paratransit operation. WSDOT assembled a team of experts from other systems that performed on-site and off-site reviews and produced a report containing 74 recommendations to save money and improve performance.
- WSDOT also helps to organize community coordination, and reviews draft engineering plans, environmental documents, and studies.

Technical guidance is helpful because many transit providers have minimal staff and cannot affordably maintain technical expertise for special projects or actions that only occur periodically. Furthermore, technology and federal compliance rules are constantly evolving, and it is often difficult to keep up with state-of-the-art practice. State DOTs can provide a helpful resource in maintaining centralized expertise, or helping to locate such expertise when needed.

Since local control is often desired, technical guidance is often optional, and is provided in the event that local providers wish to make use of it. Yet, it is still important to have clear guidelines established at the state level to provide direction for providers who develop their own programs for procurement, maintenance, etc.

## Coordination with Statewide Transit Associations

Many states, like Massachusetts, have public transit associations that monitor legislative activities, hold conferences and share technical advice. Many actively engage the state DOT in their regular meetings. Some states work more closely with state DOTs on specific issues or programs. Other association activities include:

- The Washington State Transit Association partners with WSDOT on the Peer Review Program (described above) and also worked with WSDOT to develop a framework for the statewide asset management system, ensuring any new protocols would work well with existing provider maintenance programs.
- The Arkansas State Transit Association maintains a training center and partners with the state DOT to provide specialized passenger and paratransit training programs that cover a variety of safety and operating issues.



- The Colorado Association of State Transit Agencies serves as CDOT's administrator for the state Rural Transit Assistance Program.

## Public Transit Advisory Committees

While transit provider associations and regional planning agencies provide valuable insight and input into the delivery of public transit, many states also convene public transit advisory committees (PTACs). These groups are typically composed of a broader range of stakeholders in order to introduce more wide-ranging perspectives on issues and programs.

- The Washington state PTAC is comprised of representatives from transit agencies, cities, counties, regional transportation planning organizations, associations and the Washington State Commute Trip Reduction Task Force. They advise WSDOT's Public Transportation Division on a variety of topics, including a regional mobility grant program.
- The Oregon PTAC provides a forum for transit stakeholders to communicate with the Oregon Transportation Commission and Oregon DOT. Membership includes 17 representatives of transportation providers and other interests. The PTAC reviews and makes recommendations on policy issues and investment options affecting mobility in Oregon, and provides a venue to discuss issues and solutions with regional or statewide significance. The agenda is developed based on PTAC and staff input.
- The Texas PTAC is made up of public transportation providers and members of the general public. The committee's primary responsibilities include advising the Texas Transportation Commission on the needs of public transportation providers, advising the commission on the allocation of funds, and commenting on rules affecting the delivery of public transportation.

## Training & Skills Development

Most local public transit providers have limited staffing and a broad range of operating and technical responsibilities. It is difficult to develop and manage training to cover all technical areas, or to establish skill sets to handle issues that only arise periodically. Also, many local transit providers find it difficult to find employees with appropriate skills for the transit industry. Several states offer support to address these issues:

- The North Carolina DOT offers an apprentice program in public transportation management, matching recent undergraduates with public transit providers. It is a one-year paid apprenticeship eligible for recent graduates of any NC college or university. The Public Transit Division works with the local transit provider to help supervise these apprentices. A similar program funds a 12-month part-time internship for graduate students, and typically involve some sort of research effort or completion of a special project.
- The Iowa Office of Public Transit provides training reimbursement to designated transit systems and planning agencies through its Transit Fellowship Program. Fellowships for small agencies are funded through the Rural Transit Assistance Program, while fellowships for large urban transit systems or MPOs are funded through the State Transit Assistance program.
- The Washington State Transportation Training Coalition was formed in 1997 with the goal of reducing training duplication and increasing cost-effectiveness. In addition to offering training, the Coalition develops statewide training policies and manages the resources for training. The





Coalition includes representatives from WSDOT, the State Transit Insurance Pool, the State Transit Association, and Community Transportation Association of the Northwest.

In Massachusetts, the Brockton Area Transit Authority (BAT) has established an internship program with Massasoit Junior College to develop skilled labor in the area of transit vehicle maintenance. Expansion of this program to a statewide initiative could provide positive efficiencies for the RTAs and MassDOT.

## Statewide Transit Initiatives

Opportunities to achieve operating or cost efficiencies can be realized through the development of statewide transit initiatives, using a more coordinated approach to procurement, the implementation of new technologies, asset management or other programs. State DOTs are well positioned to take the lead on such strategic initiatives.

- Many states have developed statewide transit technology plans or Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) plans. North Carolina developed a statewide technology plan and a policy to qualify for implementation funding. Virginia has an ITS Strategic Plan in which the Department of Rail and Public Transit assumes a lead role to coordinate ITS development among local transit providers, helping to facilitate the proliferation of interoperable systems across the state. Iowa has developed a statewide ITS deployment plan.
- Joint procurement initiatives are used to secure better unit pricing on equipment purchases and to ease the administrative process for small agencies. The Connecticut DOT coordinates a statewide insurance consortium to provide vehicle coverage for transit providers throughout the state. CTDOT also coordinates a consortium for the administration of a statewide drug & alcohol testing program for 41 different transit providers.
- As detailed in *Initiative 3: Improve Capital Planning*, many states have performed statewide needs assessments to help identify overall transit system needs and to establish priorities for investment. Others have developed statewide asset management systems and/or tools to assist local transit providers to inventory and assess the condition of their assets.

MassDOT has taken some action within each of these areas, (e.g. working with RTAs to coordinate statewide utilization of Charlie Card fare technology), but there is ample opportunity to further develop and coordinate in each of these areas.

## Summary of Best Practices

In many states, the DOT has developed clear protocols and guidelines, and a variety of means to support the needs of local transit providers. The content or format of these offerings is not the defining factor in whether the DOT-provider relationship will be productive and respectful; the critical factor is that the DOT takes a strong leadership role in establishing and implementing statewide transit policies and goals, and assisting local providers to meet these goals. In return, local transit providers respect the established rules and look to the DOT to provide technical assistance and guidance in better managing resources and serving their customers.

Key elements in successful DOT-provider relationships appear to include:

- Transparency
- Clear articulation of program objectives and mutual goals
- Partnership/working together to achieve these common goals
- Active engagement and direct professional interaction (e.g. DOT staff making time to meet with local providers and better understand their challenges and needs, and providers attending presentations and other meetings to understand state and federal rules and policies.)
- Innovation: identifying problems, testing solutions, and if successful, sharing them with others



- Support/Guidance in terms of capital planning, funding applications, implementing technology, training, procurement, etc, and the proper staffing levels to provide that support.
- Respect

## POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

### Summary of Issues

1. MassDOT and RTA roles are defined by Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009 and by M.G.L. Chapter 161B, yet not all responsibilities are being fulfilled as directed. In some areas, these laws are broad and leave room for interpretation. Lack of definition about roles and responsibilities results in different RTAs working through different channels, with different results. By clearly articulating state policy goals and by better defining specific planning, reporting and oversight roles and responsibilities, MassDOT can create greater opportunity for operating efficiencies and improved service delivery.
2. Other states direct, to a much greater extent than Massachusetts, the planning and reporting processes that local providers must undertake in return for receiving state operating and capital assistance. Many states provide detailed step-by-step program guidance for fulfilling these requirements either on a DOT website or in a published state transit program handbook. Requirements may include reporting on performance standards, conducting periodic service evaluations or transit planning studies, tracking and reporting asset conditions, preparing feasibility studies prior to capital investment, and quarterly/annual reporting on performance and financial statistics.
3. Limited staffing resources at both MassDOT and the RTAs underscore the need to develop a more effective partnership. In particular, limited staffing at MassDOT hampers the state's ability to provide in-depth fiscal oversight of state funding assistance, provide technical guidance and monitor program effectiveness.
4. Other states provide more guidance since most are working directly with small community transportation providers. Massachusetts RTAs are likely more knowledgeable and experienced than many of these small community operators, however they would still benefit from technical support and guidance. One local best practice example is the education program the MA Human Service Transportation office conducts with the RTAs who serve as brokers. Working with the Department of Public Health, MA HST helps to train brokerage staff, which in turn helps to establish good communication pathways between human service providers, clinics, brokers, and the HST office.
5. Poor Communication
  - There is a high level of frustration among most parties regarding the ability to communicate and get results.
  - There is a need for greater direct communication between MassDOT and the individual RTAs, as well as formal protocols for communicating with the group as a whole.
  - The roles of MARTA and the RTA Council need to be clearly defined. The RTA Council would be more successful if the agenda includes issues of mutual interest and if appropriate time and resources are dedicated to ensure appropriate solutions can be developed.
6. Lack of Partnership



- MassDOT and RTAs don't always work together as a "team"
- Need to identify mutually agreed upon goals, so everyone is working on a common mission to serve the customer and Massachusetts taxpayer.

More clearly defined goals, roles and responsibilities could improve the working relationship between MassDOT and the RTAs and, in turn, improve the delivery of transit services in the Commonwealth.

## Actions to Consider

1. Beyond what is required by Chapters 25 and 161B, how can roles and responsibilities be better defined:
  - Develop procedural guidelines and calendars with critical deadlines?
  - Define roles and responsibilities with respect to funding, service delivery, planning, asset management and performance measurement?
  - Identify directives in Chapters 25 and 161B that are not being fulfilled?
2. How can MassDOT and RTAs work more as a team, or partners in delivering public transit in MA?
  - Encourage RTA staff to become involved in MassDOT employee training and other initiatives? For example:
    - MassDOT's "*How Can I Help you Today?*" training, a department-wide training program for front line employees to ensure customer service excellence throughout the Commonwealth. Six to eight sessions are held around the state each month and are anticipated to continue for at least another year. To date, the MBTA, Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV), MassHighway and Mass Bay Commuter Rail (MBCR) have participated. Should RTA employees be invited to join?
    - MassDOT's *Universities Initiative* will be holding two-day leadership training programs for all senior managers. Should RTA Administrators be invited to attend?
  - Share expertise in other areas (procurement, training, federal compliance, technology, etc.)?
3. Is current MassDOT staffing sufficient to provide the oversight and support roles given to the Department under Chapter 25 or the Acts of 2009?
4. How can communications be improved?
  - Reconvene RTA Council in a more meaningful manner than in the past? How should the format of Council meetings be structured to ensure it provides value by addressing relevant issues at a constructive level?
  - More direct interaction between MassDOT and the RTAs rather than through MARTA?
  - Provide more opportunities for individual MassDOT-RTA meetings?
  - Strengthen RTA role within MPOs? How?



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

*M.G.L. Chapter 161B:*

<http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXXII/Chapter161b>

*Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2009:*

<http://www.malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2009/Chapter25>